

Message Text

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43

ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6958

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, TD

SUBJECT: TAPIA LEADERS NAMED TO SENATE

REF: POS 2356

SUMMARY. THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION HAS NOMINATED LLOYD BEST AND TWO OTHER MEMBERS OF THE TAPIA GROUP TO THE SENATE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO. THEIR PRESENCE IN PARLIAMENT IS DESIGNED TO UNITE AND STRENGTHEN THE OPPOSITION TO PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS' PROGRAM FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A SURPRISE MOVE OCTOBER 7, OPPOSITION LEADER ROY RICHARDSON ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD NOMINATED TAPIA GROUP SECRETARY LLOYD BEST AND TWO OTHER MEMBERS OF TAPIA'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE TO THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SENATE. BEST, IVAN LAUGHLIN, TAPIA COMMUNITY RELATIONS SECRETARY, AND HAMLET JOSEPH, A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE, WILL FILL THREE OF THE FOUR SENATE SEATS CONTROLLED BY THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION AND WILL REPLACE TWO OF RICHARDSON'S SUPPORTERS AND ONE MEMBER OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY (UDLP). ALL THREE NEW SENATORS WILL RETAIN THEIR TAPIA STATUS AND, WHILE COOPERATING IN PARLIAMENT, WILL NOT JOIN

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RICHARDSON'S UNITED PROGRESSIVE PARTY. THE FOURTH OPPOSITION

SENATOR, "ALL TRINIDAD" SUGARCANE WORKERS TRADE UNION PRESIDENT BASDEO PANDAY, WILL KEEP HIS SEAT. ALLOY LEQUAY, POLITICAL LEADER OF THE UDLP, WHICH LOST ITS SOLE SENATOR IN THE EXCHANGE, ENDORSED THE TAPIA NOMINATIONS.

2. WE BELIEVE RICHARDSON'S MOVE WAS PROMPTED BY THE DECISION OF PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS (REFTTEL), ANNOUNCED TEN DAYS EARLIER, TO REOPEN THE QUESTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN PARLIAMENT WHICH IS DOMINATED BY THE PNM AND WHICH DOES NOT HAVE A COHESIVE OPPOSITION. TAPIA, ACCORDING TO RICHARDSON, WILL ACT IN THE SENATE AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY AS A TRUSTEE FOR ALL OPPOSITION GROUPS. HE SAID THACUT M HAD SELECTED TAPIA AS THE PARTY WITH THE MOST CONSISTENT AND COHERENT POLICY TO UNITE THE FRAGMENTED OPPOSITION.

3. AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE WHICH FOLLOWED THE ANNOUNCEMENT, BEST EXPLAINED THAT TAPIA, WHICH HAS REPEATEDLY CALLED PARLIAMENT "ILLEGITIMATE" AND "UNREPRESENTATIVE," HAD AGREED TO JOIN FORCES WITH RICHARDSON AND THE UPP TO "BLOCK THE SINISTER DESIGNS NMF THE GOVERNMENT AND TO PROTECT THE CONSTITUTIONAL FUTURE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO." HE SAW IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM A MOVE TOWARD "PARLIAMENTARY DICTATORSHIP." "WHAT TAPIA'S PRESENCE WILL DO," HE SAID, "IS TO GIVE A FOCUS TO THKUOPPOSITION AND CREATE, HOPEFULLY, THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE COUNTRY WILL FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE THOSE CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL REFORMS, AND TO MAKE THEM IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE CAN PROCEED EXPEDITIOELY TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LEGITIMATE PARLIAMENT SPEAKING FOR THE PEOPLE." IN ADDITION TO CONSTITUTIONAL RE-
FORM, BEST SAID THAT TAPIA WILL USE ITS POSITION IN PARLIAMENT TO WORK FOR THE ECONOMIC REFORMS WHICH IT HAS ALREADY PROPOSED AND WILL "PUT SOME TURPENTINE IN THE TAIL OF PARLIAMENT" TO FORCE GOVERNMENT TO ACT.

4. COMMENT: BY BRINGING THE TAPIA LEADERSHIP INTO THE SENATE, RICHARDSON HAS ACQUIRED SUPPORT IN PARLIAMENT FOR THE FORTHCOMING DEBATE ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM FROM A GROUP WHICH SUPPORTS MUCH OF THE CONSTITUTION DRAFT BY THE WOODING COMMISSION. MEMBERSHIP IN THE SENATE WILL GIVE TAPIA AND BEST AN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE DIRECTLY IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS AND PERHAPS TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SHED THEIR IVORY-TOWER, INTELLECTUAL REPUTATION AND ESTABLISH A REAL POLITICAL BASE. IT IS A SIGNIFICANT MOVE IN THE PRE-ELECTION MANEUVERING FOR PLACE AMONG THOSE WHO VIEW ERIC WILLIAMS AND THE PNM ELECTORALLY VULNERABLE IF A DYNAMIC AND UNITED OPPOSITION CAN BE FORGED. IN ANY EVENT, SENATOR BEST WILL MAKE THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON THE NEW CONSTITUTION MUCH MORE LIVELY AND WILL MAKE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT THE EFFORTS OF THE PRIME MINISTER TO ENGINEER A CONSTITUTION WHICH WILL PERPETUATE PNM

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